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Latin America Review

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Argentina: Abortive Army Revolt [ ] 3.5(c)

The failure of the attempt last weekend by hardline Argentine III Corps Commander Menendez to oust moderate Army chief Viola should strengthen President Videla's hand in dealing with remaining hardline opponents of his government's policies. Viola--heir apparent to the presidency--undoubtedly was chosen as the target for the revolt because of his staunch support of these policies.

The bloodless revolt, which began early on 30 September with a demand for Viola's resignation, apparently was triggered by the release and deportation last week of former La Opinion newspaper publisher Jacobo Timerman. The decision to free Timerman, who was viewed by the hardliners as a close collaborator of Argentina's once powerful leftist guerrilla movement, reportedly had sharply increased frictions in the military hierarchy.

Menendez and other members of his faction, who have accused Videla and Viola of being soft on subversion, opposed the government's invitation last month to an Organization of American States mission to investigate widespread human rights violations. They also have bitterly attacked Videla's decision to pursue a negotiated settlement to the Beagle Channel conflict with Chile and have been constant critics of the government's economic measures.

How strongly the government will press its advantage in the wake of the failed revolt is unclear. Menendez has been relieved of his command, but no punishment has been set. His forced retirement seems a certainty. A formal court martial for Menendez could signal a general housecleaning of hardline opponents within the military.

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President Videla (l) and Army Commander Viola with armed escort during rebellion last weekend by III Corps Commander Menendez.

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At a minimum, Viola's triumph should give him a freer hand in choosing moderate officers to fill top Army jobs during the annual promotion and retirement cycle in December. Such changes would strengthen military support for moderate government policies across the board--from the divisive Beagle Channel issue to the observance of human rights.

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*The above Associated Press photo appeared in The New York Times, 1 October 1979.

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